

Tell Her You're a Catholic



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I

John looked at his watch impatiently. He really couldn't wait for Freddie much longer. The restaurant was getting crowded, and it would be awkward to hold a vacant seat indefinitely. He would allow him another ten minutes and then give it up. Well before that time elapsed, Freddie burst through the swinging doors and, after a quick glance around, dashed in the direction of his friend's table. He had a distracted air and was obviously in a great hurry. Neither of those factors needed to bring trouble, but when they do, the results can be disastrous.

Freddie's foot came down heavily on a large cat reclining half-way under one of the tables. There was a howl and a succession of spittings, as the unfortunate animal scuffled into safety. Freddie, losing his balance, brought his hand down sharply on the edge of a bowl of soup, overturning the contents neatly into the lap of a woman who was preparing to receive it internally.

John went rapidly to his friend's assistance. After a confused medley of complaints, criticisms, the fetching of cloths, profound apologies, and cat soothings, he managed to conduct Freddie to the peace of his own table. He had by now decided to forgo his other engagement, Freddie was haggard as well as distraught, and clearly needed some close attention.

After a few moments necessary to recovery, Freddie began to explain saying, "The fact is, I'm going to get married."

"My dear chap, I'm delighted, but . . ."

"Oh yes, I know, it's no reason for behaving like a bulldozer, but it's a jolly awkward situation and I can't get my mind away from it."

"Tell me all," said John. "It might save you from walking through a shop window at all events. Who's the intended?"

"Celia Thompson," said Freddie reverently.

"She joined the firm last autumn. I didn't have much to do with her until the Chief decided I needed some help in costing, God bless him. It's been wonderful working with her. She's got a such decided way with her and she's made me do lots of things that have worked out marvelously well. I've tried sometimes to think of life without her, and it looks the dreariest thing imaginable. She's the only possible girl for me."

"Well, then, what's the trouble? Doesn't she want you or don't her people like you?"

"No trouble either way. It's all that business about the promises."

"Oh hang it all," cried John. "Why couldn't she turn out to be a Catholic?"

"Well, that wasn't my fault," snapped Freddie peevishly. "When you love a girl the way I love Celia, there's no more to be said. God always knew our paths would cross and there's no sense in resisting."

"Freddie," said John, firmly, "don't talk piffle!"

"Eh!"

"Piffle. Of course, God always knew your paths would cross, but He's left you with a mind and will of your own. You're not fated to marry anyone. For goodness' sake, love like a Christian, not a fatalist."

Freddie looked at him steadily, and with some anger.

"Do you mean that I should give her up?" he asked slowly.

John was not yet prepared for that challenge. He replied, "I only mean that you must look at this thing freely. What does Celia think about the promises?"

"I haven't plucked up enough courage to mention them yet."

"Oh, come . . ."

"You don't know Celia. She's got independent views and wouldn't agree to a set of conditions. Besides, she is a wonderful girl and it's simply amazing that she gives me a second thought. How can I lay down terms and conditions to her?"

John pondered. It was all very well, he thought ruefully, to give difficult advice for another man to carry out. Besides, one look at his friend's face convinced him that he would meet with all the strange obstinacy of a weak man if he said what was certainly in his mind.

"What is Celia's religion?" he asked.

"She's got her own ideas about that. She thinks it doesn't . . ."

"Oh yes, I think I know. It doesn't really matter what church you belong to or what you believe. It's what you do that counts. You can worship God just as well in a meadow and, anyway, we're all going the same way home."

Freddie was a little slow in some things.

"That's right," he said, "but how on earth . . ."

"It's all right, old son. I've heard it all before. What does she feel about Catholicism?"

"Rather interested, I think, but I'm sure she won't take the promises. Everything will seem so one sided to her. The religious ceremony must be before a Catholic priest only. She must do nothing to draw me away from the Faith, although I have to bring her into the Church if I possibly can. All the children have to be brought up as Catholics, whatever she feels about it. A Catholic understands, of course, but it seems a terrific lot to ask from the other party. Surely it would be better to have some sort of understanding between the two of them?"

John leaned back and lit a pipe.

"I've been into this question once or twice," he said. "If you like, I'll try to explain."

"Right you are," agreed Freddie, rather moodily. "Go ahead."

"Well," said John slowly, "it's like this. Any marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic involves a possible danger to faith. If that danger is real and obvious, the marriage is forbidden by Divine Law. If it's just a general possibility, then it's forbidden by the Canon Law of the Church."

"But does that make any practical difference? I mean, if it's forbidden anyway."

"The difference is that in the first case there's no possibility of a dispensation. Where there is clear danger, God Himself says "No." We mustn't endanger the gift of faith. The Church can't dispense with the laws of God, and, of course, she doesn't want to. In a case like that, the non-Catholic might sign all the promises in creation, but no union could be allowed."

"I don't see that," objected Freddie. "If a man really loves his faith, why should an unsuitable marriage make him want to give it up?"

"It's a question of the intimacy of married life. Marriage is a union of minds, you know, before anything else. Suppose a Catholic was allowed to marry a girl who really hated the Catholic Faith and the things it stood for. He would soon find himself faced with two very unpleasant alternatives. He could stand up and fight, as he ought, and make a battlefield of his home. It would mean an end of the intimacy and would be terribly difficult if he loved her. But the only other course would be to hoist up the white flag and lapse from the Faith."

"Oh well," said Freddie. "If there's any particular danger in my marrying Celia, I don't know what it is. So if only she would sign the promises we could go ahead with the Church's blessing."

"I'm afraid you couldn't."

Freddie stared. "But if there's no danger," he began.

"If there's no particular reason to suspect danger," said John, picking his words carefully, "you may be able to go ahead but not with the Church's blessing. Canon Law is completely against mixed marriages. When one is allowed, it is never a matter of blessing or even approval. It is just dispensation and toleration. The Church can relax her own laws and, given a grave reason together with the promises, may open a door that she would rather see closed."

"But why would she rather see it closed," persisted Freddie, "when there's no harm that anyone can see? We can't spend our lives running away from shadows."

"A shadow is always cast by something, you know. Everything might appear to be plain sailing, but there are hidden dangers in a mixed marriage like submerged rocks in the sea."

"It doesn't follow that I shall strike one of them. Surely in the majority of cases things turn out quite happily."

"I hate to sound so gloomy but in many cases things turn out badly. That's just the trouble. Father Selby was talking about it only last week. There is always the danger that the Catholic party will get slack about going to Mass. Sometimes the children are not sent to Catholic schools. Some are not even baptized. In so many cases, mixed marriages leave behind a long trail of wrecked happiness and faith . . ."

"What I can't understand," interrupted Freddie frowning, "is why, if there's a struggle, the Catholic should nearly always go to the wall. Why shouldn't we win most of the time? We have a better idea where we stand."

"Yes, but it's always an unequal struggle for the Catholic."

"Why?"

"Because all the effort is on his side. Take your own case, for instance. Celia is more or less indifferent regarding religion. That means she won't need to go to Church before breakfast on a Sunday morning or even go at all unless she feels like it. She won't have to bother about regular morning and night prayers, confession, fasting, or abstinence. You have a definite way of life while she follows the mood of the moment. There's always a strong tendency in human nature to give things up and let them go and it's all on the side of the non-Catholic who has fewer obligations. There's nothing equal about a struggle like that."

"Still, the non-Catholic may not intend to interfere . . ."

"It's not always easy to avoid. All sorts of difficulties arise. It's very distracting to pray under the curious eyes of a non-Catholic who probably says her own prayers in bed. Then some arrangement has to be made about Holy Communion. Is the non-Catholic to wait for the Catholic's return or are there to

be two breakfasts? Apart from that, there's the question of Catholic Action. Not all the work of the Church can be done by priests and religious. Every day it becomes more necessary for the rest of us to pull our weight in this sad world. A Catholic couple can always manage it because their sympathies are in common. However, in a mixed marriage there's always the danger of the Church being regarded as a sort of rival, and resented as such."

"You're not very encouraging, are you?"

"I'm sorry, Freddie," said John, with very real regret. "I wish you all the happiness in the world, but that involves other things. It really would seem, where the non-Catholic promises full liberty to the Catholic to practice the Faith and agrees that the children shall go the same way, that the main dangers have been sufficiently removed. But promises aren't easy to keep, you know. They're made in one set of circumstances and have to be kept in another. Once the marriage has taken place the only safeguard is honor, and it doesn't do to have too lofty a view of human nature. Mixed marriage promises are a big undertaking and you may find that Celia is too straightforward to make them because they are more than she can guarantee."

Freddie's face cleared a little.

"I understand how you feel about this," he said. "I expect you know the general view and the official figures. However, the point is that you don't know Celia. She is not a danger to my faith. She believes in God all right, and she isn't a bit unfriendly to the Church. To see me lapse from it wouldn't please her at all."

Freddie paused, but as John made no reply, he pressed home his attack. "Why didn't you advise me to give her up?" he asked, with unexpected shrewdness. "Perhaps I should have done."

"Oh," said Freddie, "I believe you realized that it was asking too much of human nature. It would be unreasonable to expect it. Why should I go through life without the girl I love? This is a matter for my own future, and I must settle it my own way."

John was a good friend and, for that very reason, he struck at his friend's weakness saying, "When are you going to tell Celia about the promises?" he asked.

Freddie flushed, but when he looked at the John's face his anger subsided. He saw nothing there but the sheerest friendliness and no trace of a desire to score a debating point.

"You'll have to do it some time," added John gently. "Why not make it tonight? Every day will make things more awkward for you and she's not likely to blame you for saying what has to be said."

Freddie thought for awhile and then straightened himself.

"All right," he said, "I will. As a matter of fact, I'm due to call for her in about ten minutes. I'll put it to her right away."

John rather doubted this, but hoped that Freddie would manage it during the evening.

II

"I never knew anything like it," declared Celia, passing a sandwich to her friend Margaret.

Margaret dissociated the remark from the sandwich, and asked demurely, "How did he lead up to it?"

It was a glorious day, and the two girls were lunching in the park. They were by no means the least attractive part of the scenery.

"That's the funny part about it," declared Celia, throwing bread to an interested swan. "I could see that he had something on his mind all evening. But, he kept talking about all the usual things until it was nearly time to go home. Then he came out with the most extraordinary things. It was about our marriage, he said. There were some religious difficulties, but they could overcome. He

hoped I wouldn't mind making a few promises, because his Church would insist upon it. First of all, he would have to have complete freedom to practice his faith, and I must do nothing to influence him away from it."

"Would you want to?" asked her friend curiously.

"Of course not. That was what made me so furious. Freddie could go to Mass every day if he wanted to, although I wouldn't let him go out without breakfast. He isn't strong, you know. I'd even go with him sometimes, especially to High Mass. Of course, I would expect a little give and take."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I like to go up to the Abbey sometimes for Evensong and I should want him to come with me. That couldn't possibly hurt him. I haven't any definite ideas about religion and he could do as he liked. There's only one thing—I'd discourage him from going to Confession."

"Why on earth?" gasped Margaret.

"Well, he has got an inferiority complex about him, and I want him to stand on his own two feet. I know you're Catholic yourself and I don't want to annoy you. I've nothing against people going to Confession in the ordinary way, but I'm perfectly sure it isn't good for Freddie."

Margaret turned her eyes away from the lake, much to the annoyance of the swan, who had been making overtures, and looked directly at her friend. She did not like arguments, but there seemed to be no escaping this one.

"Celia," she said slowly, "this is ridiculous."

"Yes, isn't it?"

"I mean your attitude. It's impossible. I know Freddie Rookham. He's a Catholic, and a good one. He'll want to go to Holy Communion regularly. That means going out before breakfast. I'm also sure he wouldn't go to Evensong with you. Catholics believe that Christ Our Lord founded one Church for all time, and that it's the home of grace and truth. Why should Freddie worship anywhere else? As for Confession, it's not just a spiritual exercise that he could take or leave. It's an important part of the Catholic way of life."

To Margaret's surprise, Celia was not in the least annoyed.

"I'm sorry," she said contritely. "I know you Catholics feel rather strongly about things like that but you must see for yourself how one-sided these promises are. I asked Freddie if he was supposed to influence me at all. He said, 'Well, yes, I have to bring you into the Church if I can.' Just imagine me listening to him for hours and saying nothing in reply!"

Margaret laughed.

"Don't be silly," she said. "It doesn't mean that. You would have to allow Freddie full liberty and not try to draw him away from his faith. If he converted you, it would be by setting a good example, for the most part. You'd follow your own conscience, of course, but there's one situation you would always have to accept—Freddie is a Catholic. His home must be Catholic too, and . . ."

"Yes, I know, the children! All of them to be brought up and educated as Catholics. You must admit that the whole thing is one-sided."

"It is one-sided," said Margaret. "Marriage isn't a football-match."

"But why should Catholicism hold all the field?"

"Because it's the truth," said Margaret spiritedly. "The truth ought to hold everything. If you were a teacher, you wouldn't let someone come in and teach your class that the earth was flat and that the multiplication table ought to be taken with a pinch of salt. You can't split a child's mind between truth and error."

"It's only your opinion that it's the truth."

"Well, if it's our opinion, we must act upon it."

"Look here," said Celia, after a pause. "I'm officially Church of England. Why shouldn't my people, or the non-conformists, for that matter, make conditions for their members when Catholics want to marry them?"

"Well," challenged Margaret, "why don't they?"

Celia, a little surprised at the return of the question, thoughtfully threw a stone into the lake. The swan returned hopefully, and Margaret went on.

"If they felt really sure of their ground, don't you think they would? If religion was as certain to them as to the Catholic, wouldn't they want to protect their people from us?"

"I don't know how certain they are, because I'm not certain myself," said Celia composedly. "I can't see anything really definite about religion and I don't expect other people to."

"But you want to marry a man who does," pointed out Margaret.

"Yes, and goodness knows, he can go his own way. I love him too much to want to upset his peace of mind. As for the children . . ."

"Yes?" asked Margaret quickly.

"I shouldn't interfere with them. I don't believe in it. I think we ought to leave them alone and not cram them with our ideas. It would be nice to see them saying their prayers, but they could make up their minds about dogma when they are old enough."

Margaret shook her head decisively. "It isn't good enough," she said.

"But what in the world do you expect?"

"Don't you see that in bringing up the children as Catholics, Freddie will need your help, to put it mildly? They ask questions, you know."

"Oh, of course, children ought to be encouraged to talk."

"They need precious little encouragement. Most of them talk all the time. They ask ultimate things, too. Most of the questions would come to you while Freddie was away at the office. You say you wouldn't interfere. But what about the dresses and veils for First Communion and Confirmation? What about getting them off to Mass on Holydays and fixing up a Catholic school? You couldn't just leave everything to Freddie."

"I might do all sorts of things when it came to the point," said Celia easily, "but I'm not going to promise anything. I like Catholicism—flowers, incense, processions, and all that—but I'm not going to keep my ideas in the lumber room and give Freddie's religion the free run of the house."

"If you really feel that way about it, any Catholic would respect you and understand. But the Church has to protect the marriage of a Catholic, and would insist on the promises, if you married him."

"So Freddie said, but it's nonsense. There must be some way out of it. It finally came out that a friend of his, John Heywood, put him up to all this. Freddie is going to take me to see him tonight. I'll give him dispensations, tolerations, undertakings and promises! Pass another sandwich, there's a dear."

Margaret's face reddened. "I say, I'm awfully sorry, that blessed swan has had the last one. I didn't realize what I was doing."

"Oh well, it's time I was moving," said Celia philosophically. And the two girls rose and sauntered through the sunshine to the park gates.

Suddenly Celia said, "You're not really happy about all this, are you?"

"Well, no, I can't pretend I am," replied Margaret.

"Do you think I ought to give him up?"

Women are frequently more courageous than men.

"Yes," said Margaret simply.

"But surely you can see that when a girl loves a man, she must do something about it?"

"Oh yes, but it doesn't follow that she must give herself to him."

"That's all very well," said Celia vigorously, "but would you give up a man you loved because he was a non-Catholic?"

"Well, I did once, you know," said Margaret, rather hesitatingly.

"I never heard about it."

"No, I never let it go far enough. It was a couple of years ago. You haven't met him anyway. I loved him all right and I knew he wanted me. I hoped against hope that the Faith might win him, but it was so obvious that he wasn't nearly ready for that. There are so many snags in a mixed marriage, that I wouldn't encourage him. But it meant a pretty bad time for a few weeks."

"Why only a few weeks?"

"It was easier after that because of something that came out quite by chance. A group of us were talking about the size of families and the difficulties people have under present conditions. He turned out to be quite a pessimist and thought that no one ought to have more than one child."

"But he might have changed his mind about that. People say these things, but if he was in a sound position . . ."

"That wasn't all. When you do have to be careful about children, there are two ways of doing it. There's the decent, natural way of self-control—and there's the other. He preferred the other."

"Oh, I see," said Celia slowly. "I know you Catholics hate that sort of thing, and I don't care for the idea myself. Perhaps you were well out of it. It's essential to have a proper understanding before getting married."

"Talking of that," said Margaret, "did you tell Freddie what you thought about going out before breakfast, and Evensong, and Confession?"

"Well, no, it is a little difficult, and I don't want to upset him. There's time enough for all that after we're married. For goodness' sake give that conscience of yours a rest. We'll find a way out somehow."

Celia's voice was becoming just a little sharp and Margaret decided, rightly or wrongly, to let the matter drop for the present.

At the gates the two girls parted company, but instead of going straight home as she had intended, Margaret walked quickly to a little Catholic church in the vicinity to spend ten minutes before the Blessed Sacrament.

She did not like the look of things at all.

Celia made her threatened descent upon John that evening with an anxious Freddie in tow. John, who had been expecting a lonely evening, was pleasantly surprised, though a little tense. He did not fail to notice Celia's attractiveness, or the fact that her very assertiveness carried its own charm. Celia found him likeable, and soon the conversation was on an easy footing. It turned to the prospective nuptials.

"What I can't understand about you Catholics," said Celia, "is your attitude to danger. No one could say that you were timid. You stand against the world on some things, and you don't seem to mind being unpopular. Yet you're simply terrified of your people marrying non-Catholics. I can see that there might be what you would call perversion in some cases. But good heavens, everything is a risk nowadays, and you can't expect marriage to be any different!"

John filled his pipe slowly. He rather liked this sort of thing.

"The question of what risks we ought to take is a curious little problem," he said. "We certainly can't live without incurring danger, and we shouldn't live long if we ignored it. Perhaps it's difficult to make a precise rule, but a pretty sound guide is the word 'proportion.'"

"Yes, but what proportion?" murmured Celia, a little amused by this opening.

"That's the whole point," went on John, unabashed. "If, for example, a man gives his life to get a woman out of a burning house, then we say he has made a great sacrifice. He has taken a grave risk and it has gone against him. However, as his object was to save another human life, the risk was well in proportion. Suppose he took the same chance with the idea of saving a pet dog. In that case, the risk would be out of all proportion and his life would have been thrown away on something comparatively trifling."

"But he might feel even more affection for the dog," put in Celia facetiously.

"Feelings don't come into it. It is a fact that a human life is worth more than all the dogs in creation and something very great has been given for something very small."

Celia wrinkled her nose. "All right," she said, "but I still don't see . . ."

"Well, notice what would happen in a mixed marriage where the risk was really grave. The parties would hope for a lifetime of married happiness. For this, the Catholic would pay the price of his faith, which is the first essential step on the road to eternal happiness. The children, who belong to the purpose of marriage, would be brought up in divided faith, or more probably, no faith at all. The risk would be out of all proportion."

"But is faith really so important as all that?" put in Celia. "Surely it's what you do that matters."

"The truth is," returned John, "we are not made for ourselves, but for God. What we have to do is to prepare for the intimate knowledge and love of God in Heaven. Faith in this life is the beginning of all that. God expects us to believe in Him and all the various things He has made known, which include our own purpose. That's why nothing can justify a Catholic in exposing his faith to peril. There is no proportion because nothing could be worth such a price. Faith is God's light in a dark world."

"And I suppose," said Celia impatiently, "that it might not shine in a mixed marriage because there are too many draughts to put it out. If faith is a gift of God, it doesn't seem a very substantial one."

"There's nothing wrong with the gifts of God," replied John, quite coolly. "But there's something wrong with our fallen natures that have to respond to them. Also, it's not so much a question of a draught. It's a matter of a persistently unfriendly atmosphere in the very heart of married life. Given those circumstances, the flame could very easily die out."

"Yes, but look here," said Freddie, rousing himself, "surely a man can counteract that sort of thing? I mean, he could go off to his Mass and Confession and keep up his practice generally, even if the atmosphere at home was anti- Catholic."

"He could, but he would have to fight for his faith in his own home and among his own family. Not a very happy state of affairs, surely? Generally speaking, a Catholic has to put up with an alien atmosphere whilst he's away at work. He finds it difficult to talk easily and naturally in the office about matters of religion when the topic comes up. When he gets back to his own hearth and home, it ought to be a return to the atmosphere of his faith, so that it's home in the full sense. If he has to come back to a hostile camp, is it so very surprising that he lapses, human nature being what it is?"

"The situation can't be so bad is all that," said Celia, "or your Church wouldn't allow so many dispensations."

"Quite often it isn't," said John. "If a marriage is seen to be dangerous, then it mustn't happen. In other cases, faith doesn't appear to be threatened, and the promises are readily made . . . "

"And very one-sided they are!"

"The Church can't possibly arrange this sort of thing upon equal terms. Where you have two hostile atmospheres, you won't find them mingling together happily. One of them will displace the other. In the case of yourself and Freddie, the atmosphere of the home will either be Catholic or indifferent. The children will either go to Mass or be little agnostics. That consideration is before the Church when she makes her laws about marriage."

"That's a queer habit you Catholics have," murmured Celia, "referring to the Church as 'she.' I never could get used to it."

"Oh, that just presses the fact that the Church is the Bride of Christ and the Mother of us all. Being a mother, she can't possibly ignore the truth that a mixed marriage is a risky road for one of her children to tread. Her law really forbids them to go that way at all."

"I'll ask you again," said Celia. "If that's true, then why all these dispensations?"

For just a moment, John hesitated, and then decided that this was no time for diffidence. "It's to avoid greater evils," he said, rather gruffly.

Celia flushed. She was not a girl who liked being tolerated.

In his corner Freddie stirred uncomfortably, opened his mouth and closed it again.

"I'm sorry," said John, "but that really is the situation. When Catholics marry non-Catholics, there's no escaping the fact that they run counter to the advice of the Church. When for a serious reason she allows them to do it, they stand in very particular need of her protection, both for themselves and for their children. Hence the promises."

"I can only say," said Celia, in a rather steely voice, "that they're not at all necessary so far as I am concerned. Freddie needs no protection from me. I like Catholicism, and wouldn't dream of interfering."

"Sorry to interrupt," put in John briskly, "but in that case, don't you think it would be a good idea to get some instruction in the Faith? It wouldn't commit you in the slightest degree, and at the very least it would give you a better idea of your own position. No one would want you to enter the Church for Freddie's sake, but if Catholicism really appeals to you, you owe it to yourself to get a rather closer view."

Celia shook her head.

"No," she said, "you're going a little too fast. It's only one or two things here and there that appeal to me. There's the Nuptial Mass, for instance. I went to one last yea and it is a thrilling thing to have when you get married. I've been looking forward for months to having one with Freddie."

A gasp she heard from Freddie and something she read in John's face checked her abruptly. "What in the world," she asked slowly, "is the matter now?"

"I ought to explain this at once," said John seriously. "As far as a mixed marriage is concerned, there's no possible chance of a Nuptial Mass."

Celia began to look really annoyed so John decided that he had better continue.

"Whatever the Church may think of the individual non-Catholic," he said, "a mixed marriage is no occasion for rejoicing. In the very best cases, something of the full beauty of Christian marriage has to be lost and farther down the scale there is disappointment and tragedy. The Church knows that and expresses it in her silence. There must be no Nuptial Mass."

Celia turned to Freddie and asked, "Freddie, did you know about this?"

"Well, yes," said Freddie awkwardly, "but there didn't seem to be any point in bringing it up."

"And do you mind?" she asked, with very great gentleness.

"Well, I suppose I do really, but," Freddie's voice trailed off helplessly. He could never think of that bleak, short ceremony — that ghost of a richer thing — without a real pang at heart.

Celia turned again to John and, for the third time within two days asked the crucial question. "Do you really think that we should give each other up?"

John thought rapidly. He had evaded this question once and was not impressed with the result. He threw caution to the winds saying, "Yes, I do. It seems a very unfriendly thing to say but, even with the help of the promises, mixed marriages are a mistake. Marriage is a religious thing and if the partners have different religions they begin under a cloud. Their happiness is threatened by the very nature of the case."

Celia looked at him curiously.

"Is that your opinion, or what your Church teaches?" she asked.

"They're not different things, and even humanly speaking, the Church must be right on this question. She doesn't merely look back to past ages, She was **in** those ages, twenty centuries of them, and they were part of her life. Alao, She doesn't just look around the world. She embraces the world and the experiences of all manner of men become her experience. With all that behind her, She says to her children, 'If you marry, marry a Catholic.' Do you think it's really likely that she's wrong?"

Freddie was about to retort with some heat, but Celia squeezed his arm and replied herself.

"You'll agree that I've been pretty patient," she said, "and I think I see your point of view. However, it's your point of view and not mine. You people are sure that your religion is right and you base all your laws on that certainty. I don't see anything very certain in this world. If I were sure that God had walked the earth, and your Church was the mother of men, I should go your way and there would be nothing to argue about. As it is, it seems that your Church doesn't want me to marry Freddie, but if I will agree to a set of promises, I may be tolerated. Well, I don't like being tolerated and I won't sign the promises. I'm sorry about this Freddie. I wanted to be married in Church

and with full ceremony too. But we must just face the fact that it's not to be."

"But what on earth can we do?" burst out Freddie.

Celia looked at him in amazement.

"My dear Freddie," she said soothingly, "isn't it obvious? What alternative is there? We shall have to be content with the Registry Office. After all, we shall be married in the sight of God."

There was a pause. Freddie seemed to be having difficulty in finding words. He found one word, however, and that was enough.

"No," he said.

His tone was absolute, and Celia sat speechless. John sat and watched, not for the first time, a clash between the world and the Church at arms.

Freddie had now found more words, and they emerged.

"You know I love you, Celia, and want more than anything else to marry you. However, it's got to be marriage. If I went along to a Registry Office with you it wouldn't mean a thing."

For a moment, Celia looked helplessly at John.

"Freddie's quite right," he said. "The Ne Temere Decree in 1908 was very definite. Unless Freddie marries before a Catholic priest the union is invalid."

Still Celia said nothing. To her dying day, she never knew whether at that moment she was more astonished or angry. In either case, she found it a situation beyond words. Freddie, good natured and easily persuaded, sat looking like a rock, and Celia had seen enough of practicing Catholics to know that the road she had chosen was finally closed to her.

After a while, she rose, moved to the table, and there was a little rattle as a ring fell. Within a few moments, she had left, leaving the two men alone.

Two days later John was back in the restaurant, again waiting for Freddie, and trying to decide how to open the conversation. He was sure he ought to be neither breezy nor solemn, but, beyond that, he seemed to have no ideas at all.

The swing doors moved and his friend entered. As he crossed the floor, John was startled to see that he was not resigned but positively jubilant. Neither was he in the least distracted. The resident cat, with the sublime indifference of her kind, lay in exactly the same position, but was left in peace this time.

Freddie took a seat and beamed radiantly.

"It's all right, old man," he said, without preamble. "Celia's taking instruction."

"What!"

"I thought that would shake you," said Freddie complacently, "but it's true. She's arranged to see Father Selby twice a week."

"But only the other night . . . "

"Yes, I know. There wasn't much sign of it, was there? But I had better tell you the story from the beginning." John agreed that he should do so.

"When Celia left us that night," said Freddie, "she walked about for half an hour to cool off. Then it suddenly occurred to her to call on Father Selby. She couldn't get rid of the idea that somehow those promises might be dispensed. Fortunately, he was home, and they talked for over an hour. Of course, she didn't get any change out of him about the promises, but all kinds of other things came up. For instance, she brought up that idea about worshipping God in a meadow, and Father Selby grinned and asked her how often she did it. That annoyed her. She said that she didn't mean that she went down on her knees among the daisies, but only that you could worship God at any time or place. Father Selby said of course; but, in view of the weakness of human nature, wasn't it a good idea to have a definite time and place? That rather got under her guard, because she loves order and method. It's one of the things that she intends to impress upon me."

"But there must have been more to it than that?"

"Oh, there was, quite a lot. Celia always thought Confession a bit unmanly, but he showed her that it often meant a real effort. Her attractions to Catholicism went rather deeper than either of us imagined. He brought them out."

"He must be a genius," said John.

"He's a marvel," agreed Freddie. "

"It was only the end of a process, you know. Celia explained it to me. You see, she's always been used to getting her own way with people, and it surprised her to find four Catholics standing up to her, one after the other, on the marriage question. She was most shaken when I joined the ranks of the opposition, because I'd never denied her anything before. It was then that she started to ask herself what other Church made all those careful laws and provisions about marriage. She remembered what you said about the Church being the universal Mother and began to feel that she needed something like that herself."

"I think I see," said John, "but suppose she doesn't go through with it."

"She'll go through with it all right," said Freddie happily. "Celia only needs to see the Faith and Father Selby will make her do that. She loves certainty and confidence and that's what the Church will offer her."

John took a deep breath.

"Well, it's wonderful," he said. "I say, Freddie, do you realize what a narrow escape you've had?"

"What do you mean exactly?"

"Celia wouldn't make the promises, because she didn't feel herself in a position to make guarantees of that kind. Suppose she had been a little less honest and straightforward. Suppose she had taken the promises and quietly forgotten all about them afterwards! It has happened in plenty of other cases, you know. Between your faith and your love, you would have been torn to bits!"

Freddie nodded soberly.

"Yes," he said, "I ought to have made a stand against a mixed marriage from the beginning. All things considered, it simply isn't worth the risk."

Both men fell silent, musing not only upon the bright promise of future skies, but also upon that long grey shadow of what might have been.

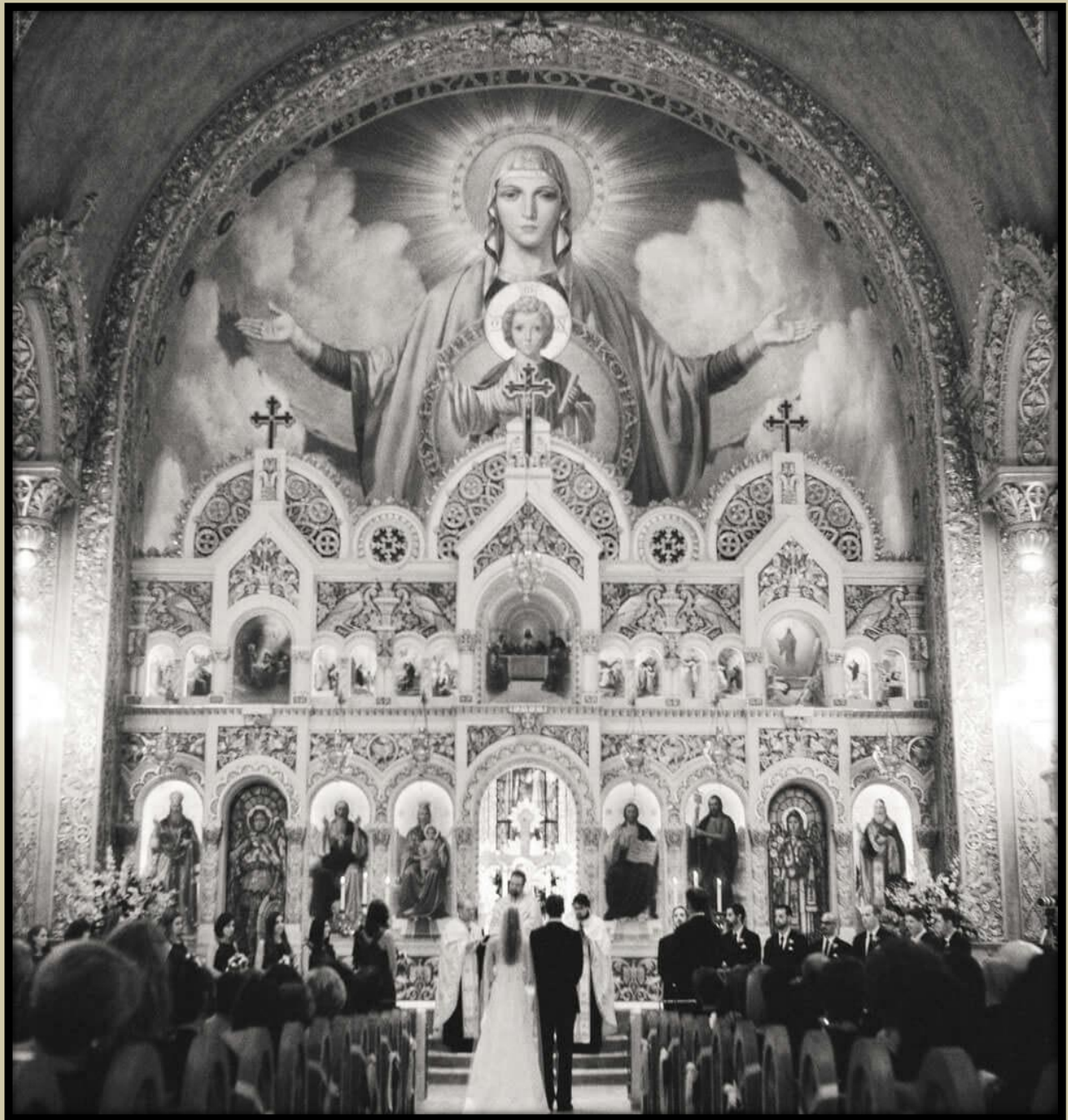


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This e-book was produced by:

The Seraphim Company, Inc.

**8528 Kenosha Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80908-5000**

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